WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of screening a test molecule for ERβ agonist activity, wherein the method comprises the steps of:

a) TPH mRNA riboprobe with a biological sample;

b) determining the level of transcription of TPH in the sample by hybridization, thereby generating data for a test level; and

c) comparing the test level to a control level, wherein an increase in TPH transcript level in the sample relative to the control indicates ERβ agonist activity of the test molecule.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the transcription of TPH is induced by an ERβ agonist.

3. A method of screening a test molecule for ERβ agonist activity comprising the steps of:

a) contacting the molecule and TPH primers with a biological sample;

b) determining the level of transcription of TPH in the sample by reverse transcription and polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR), thereby generating data for a test level; and

c) comparing the test level to a control level, wherein an increase in TPH transcript level in the sample relative to the control indicates ERβ agonist activity of the test molecule.

4. The methods of claim 3, wherein the expression of TPH is induced by an ERβ agonist.

5. The method according to claim 3, wherein the control level is obtained by measuring the level of TPH mRNA transcripts in a sample that has been vehicle treated.

6. A kit for TPH assay comprises a TPH mRNA riboprobe.

7. The kit of claim 6, further comprises a hybridization buffer.

8. The kit of claim 6, wherein *in situ* hybridization histochemistry is employed for the assay.

9. The kit of claim 6, wherein the concentration of the riboprobe is between about 1 and about 500 ng/ml.

10. The kit of claim 6, wherein the concentration of the riboprobe is between about 20 and about 200 ng/ml.

11. The kit of claim 6, wherein the concentration of the riboprobe is about 75 ng/ml.

12. A kit for TPH assay comprises TPH primers.

13. The kit of claim 12 further comprises components selected from the group consisting of a reverse transcriptase buffer, a reverse transcriptase enzyme, a PCR buffer, dNTPs, and a thermostable DNA polymerase.

14. The kit of claim 12, wherein RT-PCR is employed for the assay to amplify a target nucleic acid.

15. The kit of claim 14 wherein the RT-PCR is real time RT-PCR.

16. The kit of claim 12, wherein the target nucleic acid is RNA.

17. The kit of claim 12, wherein the concentration of the primer is between about 1 and about 500 ng/ml.

18. The kit of claim 12, wherein the concentration of the primer is between about 20 and about 200 ng/ml.

19. The kit of claim 12, wherein the concentration of the primer is about 75 ng/ml.

20. The kit of claim 12, wherein the concentration of the primer is about 25 ng/ml.